



Home > Media centre > Media releases > Casuals hardest hit by job losses in 2020

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Media Release

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i Source: [Characteristics of Employment, Australia, August 2020](#)

Casual workers accounted for around two-thirds of people who lost a job early in the COVID-19 period, according to new annual data and analysis of quarterly Labour Force data released today by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Working Arrangements

Head of Labour Statistics at the ABS, Bjorn Jarvis, said: "Total employment fell from around 13 million to 12.2 million between February and May 2020, with two thirds of the fall occurring in casual employment."

Employment in casual jobs fell from 2.6 million to 2.1 million between February and May 2020.

"Prior to the COVID period, casuals accounted for around 25 per cent of all employees. This fell to around 20 per cent in May," Mr Jarvis said.

Between May and August, casual employment rose to 2.3 million, a recovery of around 37.2 per cent of the earlier fall. Estimates for November 2020 will be published in detailed Labour Force statistics on 23 December.

| | Employees with leave entitlements | Casuals | Owner managers | TOTAL | |
|--------|-----------------------------------|---------|----------------|---------|---------|
| | | | | Million | Million |
| Aug-19 | | 8.1 | 2.6 | 2.2 | 12.9 |
| Nov-19 | | 8.2 | 2.6 | 2.2 | 13.0 |
| Feb-20 | | 8.3 | 2.6 | 2.1 | 13.0 |
| May-20 | | 8.0 | 2.1 | 2.0 | 12.2 |
| Aug-20 | | 8.1 | 2.3 | 2.1 | 12.5 |

| | Employees with leave entitlements | Casuals | Owner managers | TOTAL |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------|--------------|
| Feb-20 to May-20 | -210,000 | -540,000 | -100,000 | -860,000 |
| May-20 to Aug-20 | 90,000 | 200,000 | 50,000 | 340,000 |

More detailed annual data, released today, showed further impacts on different forms of employment.

Between August 2019 and August 2020, the number of people working as full-time independent contractors fell 9.4 per cent, from 670,000 to 610,000. In contrast, employees working on a fixed-term contract increased 6.1 per cent, from 390,000 to 410,000.

Further details can be found in [Working arrangements \(<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/working-arrangements/latest-release>\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/working-arrangements/latest-release) available on [www.abs.gov.au \(<http://www.abs.gov.au>\)](http://www.abs.gov.au).

Employee earnings

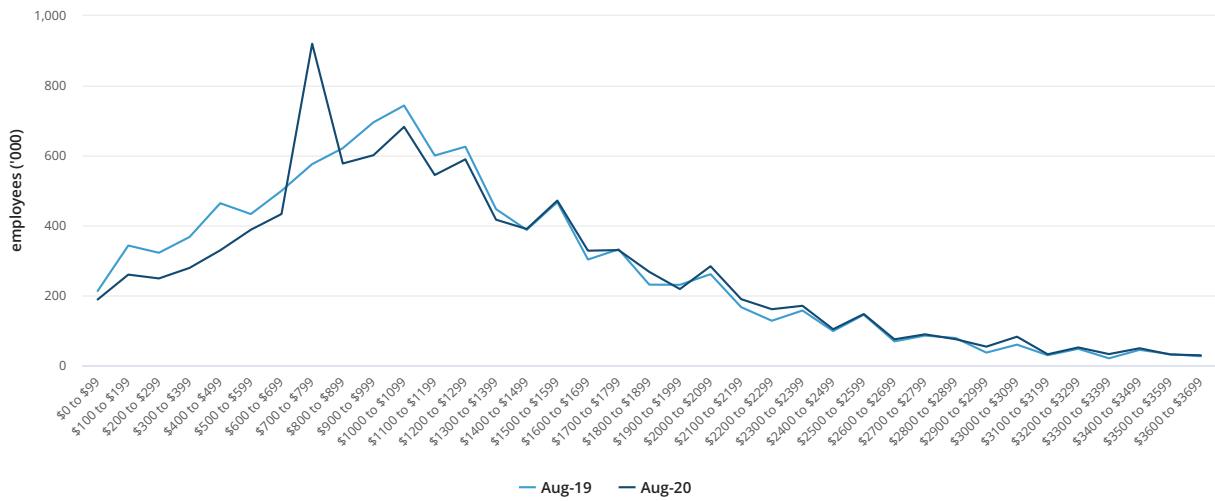
There were significant changes to the distribution of employee earnings between August 2019 and August 2020, highlighting the extent of changes to employment and earnings for lower paid workers.

Head of Labour Statistics at the ABS, Bjorn Jarvis, said: "The distributional data in today's release provides insights into the extent of major compositional changes we have seen in other statistics, such as the increase in [Average weekly earnings \(<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/average-weekly-earnings-australia/latest-release>\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/average-weekly-earnings-australia/latest-release) in May."

There was considerable change in employment and earnings for lower paid workers, with a sizeable increase in people earning around \$750 per week, the amount of the JobKeeper wage subsidy.

920,000 employees earned between \$700 and \$799 per week in August 2020, which was much higher than the 580,000 people in August 2019.

Weekly earnings distribution



The median earnings of casuals increased from \$546 in August 2019 to \$624 in August 2020, an increase of 14.3 per cent. This strong increase reflected the loss of many low paid casual jobs and some casuals earning more as a result of JobKeeper support.

This increase was much higher than for employees with leave entitlements, whose median earnings increased by 4.0 per cent.

Further details can be found in [Employee earnings \(<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/employee-earnings/latest-release>\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/employee-earnings/latest-release) available on www.abs.gov.au (<https://www.abs.gov.au>)

Trade union membership

Trade union membership fell by 42,000 to 1.5 million employees between August 2018 and August 2020. The membership rate was 14.3 per cent of all employees in August 2020, compared to 14.6 per cent in 2018 and 19.5 per cent ten years ago.

Further details can be found in [Trade union membership \(<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics>\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics)

[/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/trade-union-membership/latest-release](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediaserv?OpenDocument&js=enabled)) available on [www.abs.gov.au \(https://www.abs.gov.au\)](https://www.abs.gov.au).

Media notes

- Data from the Characteristics of employment survey can be found in the following pages on the ABS website:
 - [Characteristics of employment \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/characteristics-employment-australia/latest-release\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/characteristics-employment-australia/latest-release)
 - [Employee earnings \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/employee-earnings/latest-release\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/employee-earnings/latest-release)
 - [Working arrangements \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/working-arrangements/latest-release\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/working-arrangements/latest-release)
 - [Trade union membership \(https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/trade-union-membership/latest-release\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/earnings-and-work-hours/trade-union-membership/latest-release)
- Employees are the subset of employed people who worked for an employer and received remuneration by wage, salary or otherwise.
- Casual employees used in this release are defined as employees without leave entitlements.
- It is important to note that most casual employees can work or expect to work in their jobs for 12 months or longer. Casual employment should therefore not be assumed to be temporary employment.
- Median is a statistical term referring to the middle point of a distribution. In the case of earnings, it refers to the earnings of the person in the middle of the distribution, with the same number of people earning more and less than them. Unlike means or simple averages, medians are not skewed by very high and very low earners.
- Earnings are the pre-tax amount paid to employees for work done or time worked (including paid leave), and are a subset of employee income. This data can provide insights into the effect of JobKeeper support on the earnings distribution, but can't identify people supported by JobKeeper or their characteristics.
- When reporting ABS data you must attribute the Australian Bureau of Statistics (or the ABS) as the source.
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